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Perspectives on curriculum construction at the postsecondary level: Contexts, approaches, principles

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A curriculum is an attempt, wrote Stenhouse three decades ago (1975, 4), to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice.

If one applies that notion of curriculum to the foreign language field in general, and to second- or foreign-language learning in U.S. colleges and universities in particular, one is immediately confronted with a dilemma: how can we speak of a foreign-language curriculum at the college level when a principled approach that is open to scrutiny and that builds on the key feature of the educational proposal in question, namely the long-term nature of second-language learning in an intellectually appropriate environment, does not exist, conceptually or in practice?

Indeed, much of what passes for curriculum discussion at the college level is actually something quite different. On the one hand, it pertains to a small group of courses—more or less interesting, more or less connected—that aim to teach language, or it addresses content that is to be covered in individual courses, where that content is severed from its contexts and origins in the second language. On the other hand, deliberations putatively focused on curriculum are actually focused on diverse approaches to teaching, particularly the teaching of language. Thus they can erroneously convey the idea that pedagogy is a particularly pressing concern in language courses and of lesser relevance for the so-called content courses.

From these practices it follows that a genuine discussion of curriculum requires a thorough rethinking of the context of collegiate foreign-language teaching and learning. The initial goal of that reconsideration is to enable us to develop a course of study that is publicly available (and thus open to critical scrutiny), that involves both content and pedagogies in support of all learning that language departments envision for the typical four years of undergraduate

years, and that takes account of issues of implementation that are peculiar to the college context.

Beyond the immediate benefit for curriculum construction itself, we should expect an explicitly curricular perspective to engage us in a critical interpretation of our profession's past as well as in an innovative vision of its future. Given the unfamiliarity of the topic in collegiate foreign-language circles, such a perspective may not be easy to accept and adopt. Yet it is necessary if foreign-language education is to be both intellectually and socially accountable in an age of proliferating demands for competence in more than one language, for attainment of advanced levels of ability in those several languages, and for multiple identities in a multicultural and global environment.

Put another way, abandoning the current curriculum by default in favor of a curriculum by design (Byrnes 1998) would be one way to practice what Shulman (2000) calls professional fidelity. At minimum, the resulting designing of entire foreign language programs would link content and second-language acquisition and produce extended language-learning opportunities in order to create the necessary conditions for high levels of student performance in the second language. The overarching goal is to enable learners to become competent users of more than one language in all walks of life.

To chart a possible path toward that goal this paper treats three issues. First, I will highlight several aspects of the *context* in which foreign languages are taught at the postsecondary level. Although these aspects are not directly curricular they strongly influence curriculum construction in higher education. Second, I will provide a brief overview of general *approaches* to curriculum building. Third, I will conclude by sketching out some *principles* for curriculum construction that local initiatives might employ as they reposition and re-envision their programs.

The contexts of curriculum construction

Several features of the context in which foreign languages are taught at the postsecondary level have implications for curriculum building.

Much second language instruction takes place at the postsecondary level

In the U.S., in contrast with most other industrial countries, tertiary institutions are responsible for an unusually high share of foreign-language teaching and learning. This is so because, even after the success of the Standards movement to, at least, assert a claim for a position in the core, K-12 foreign-language instruction remains largely a choice to be made by school districts, even individual schools (Standards 1996). At the same time, most faculty members teaching at the college level are unprepared for the language teaching demands made of them inasmuch as their educational background and professional interests lie in literary-cultural studies with little awareness, other than by experience, of issues pertaining to language teaching and learning. Furthermore, their own research and teaching in literary-cultural studies is increasingly conceived as language-independent, abstract, and theory-driven (Byrnes 2002a) and, therefore, as separate from language-acquisition issues and foreign-language pedagogy (Byrnes and Kord 2001).

By contrast, a true, extended curricular approach inherently asserts the centrality of the link between language and the creation of meaning and knowledge in all human endeavors and constructs a curricular progression in line with that conviction. Intellectually, a curricular approach affirms the essential connection between, on the one hand, the acquisition of the second language and, on the other hand, the academic content and educational aspirations of a foreign-language department's program. Functionally, a curricular approach asserts a collective responsibility on the part of all faculty members for realizing a department's educational goals by means of a broadly agreed upon pedagogy that resides within the chosen curricular context. For that reason an explicitly designed and implemented curriculum constitutes, perhaps, the best way in which the profession can begin to address the mismatch that severely reduces both the intellectual presence and the functional capacities of many collegiate foreign-language departments, a disjuncture that, at times, threatens the very existence of collegiate foreign-language departments (Schneider 2001).

Indeed, a consensually developed curriculum proposal may in these times of fiscal constraints be necessary to provide administrators with a rationale for retaining the structural contexts in which foreign languages have

traditionally been taught. Administrative structures exist in order to facilitate synergies between valued faculty work, existing faculty expertise, and desired educational practices. Absent such synergies, two interrelated questions arise: why should institutions maintain separate and comprehensive foreign-language departments and why should departments as academic units resist internal and external urges to spin off language instruction?

The recent spate of creating language centers has provided thought-provoking answers to both questions. To some, language centers reflect the inability or unwillingness of the faculty of foreign-language departments to take seriously their curricular and pedagogical obligations (Bernhardt 2002), therefore constitute an advance over the *status quo* of (benign) neglect that characterizes so many language departments. Others note that, for all their benefits, language centers tend to detract from the intellectual merits of the remainder of the foreign-language program and even subvert the essence of foreign-language study as a whole. This is so because they reduce, even restrict, the language-learning enterprise to the status of service and skill training. By extension, language centers can all too easily justify another administrative relocation, namely that of housing the study of foreign literatures and cultures within English or comparative literature departments or area studies programs, instead of valued foreign language departments. Under such circumstances, the likelihood of learners attaining upper levels of second-language ability and sophisticated cultural knowledge and insights—abilities gained through extended and reflective engagement with content as handled in the communities that use that language (e.g., academics in a variety of disciplines, business people, policy makers, lawyers, engineers, health care providers)—is seriously endangered.

In sum, developing a curriculum in collegiate foreign language departments constitutes a much needed answer to numerous intellectual and systemic-structural concerns that arise in conjunction with collegiate foreign language learning in the U.S. Seen in this light, curriculum construction becomes an indispensable, informed, and forward-looking counter-proposal in the face of restrictive, at times even adverse realities.

U.S. institutions must respond to the demand for language instruction in multiple languages

Although English has become the international *lingua franca*, assuming the role that Latin played for a good thousand years of Western civilization, there is good evidence, particularly in K-12 enrollments, that globalization has also caused an *increase* in the demand for foreign-language knowledge by native speakers of English. Private and public interest is rising for a citizenry that commands advanced language abilities in more than one language, a kind of multiple literacy, in order to respond to economic globalization and to satisfy people's search for individual and societal multilingualism and multiculturalism. As a result, American educational institutions must find ways to accommodate instruction in numerous languages that are politically or culturally important to the United States or that are widely spoken by immigrant populations. This contrasts with the situation in many other countries, which can put their educational resources into teaching two or three languages—the dominant one almost always being English.

Given the financing of public secondary education in the United States and the many societal goals the secondary curriculum must meet, it is unlikely that precollegiate students will have the opportunity for multiyear, consecutive study of more than one language. One may bemoan that fact. But one may also interpret it as an extraordinary challenge to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in the limited second-language learning opportunities that do exist—whenever the system is able to offer them and whenever and for whatever length of time students are able to seize them. As previously stated, colleges bear an unusually heavy burden in that regard.

Spanish requires particular consideration

Most of the recent increase in K-12 foreign-language instruction has occurred in Spanish, in a fashion that some view as a threat to the other languages (Welles 2004). One way of avoiding the trap of seeing the flourishing of Spanish as dangerous competition would be to place the demand for that language outside standard foreign-language instructional considerations and reinterpret it in terms of an incipient societal bilingualism—in other words, to

make it more akin to English-language instruction throughout the curriculum, a phenomenon that is already strong in the South, Southwest, and West (Rasplica Rodd 2002).

Two questions arise. First, how would the teaching and learning of Spanish—as a quasi second language—differ from the teaching and learning of other languages? Representing one aspect of this question, *The Stanford University Initiative for the Maximization of Language Resources,* under the direction Guadalupe Valdés and Joshua Fishman, examines how direct instruction in heritage and immigrant languages can reverse or retard the process of intergenerational language change and language shift. Second, how do we ensure that instruction in the other languages is not only sustained throughout the educational system but benefits society through an emerging societal bilingualism? This question has taken on particular urgency under the impact of the No Child Left Behind Legislation (see the position paper by Marcia Rosenbusch and concurrent commentaries in *Perspectives* 2005). An enlightened curricular perspective would offer important responses to both questions.

The less commonly taught languages must be part of curricular planning

A curricular frame of reference might enable reconsideration of yet a fourth feature of the country's language context—the need to assure instruction in what are called the less commonly taught languages.

Here I suggest that any program that cannot rely on a K-12 instructional base but must bring students from no knowledge to usable, preferably advanced, levels of competence within the four-year confines of American undergraduate education should be thought of as a program in a less commonly taught language. By rethinking the status of the less commonly taughts—and understanding them not in terms of nationally aggregated enrollment numbers but in terms of particular institutional settings and student learning demands—we would sharpen our ability to understand central features of the requisite curricula in any language—in Japanese, Chinese, and Russian as in French, German, Italian, and Spanish. In other words, when previous high-school language instruction cannot be presumed, or when students wish to acquire a third language during their college years, curricular planning becomes crucial. Only with a curricular proposal in place can one

reasonably expect that students will achieve high levels of competence in a particular language in a particular institutional setting and, subsequently, in the workplace.

Far from being an inconsequential semantic game, such a reconceptualization asserts that curriculum construction is not an option but a critical systemic concern because of demands for efficiency and effectiveness that, in turn, are the consequence of the restricted time ceded to the complex task of language learning. If extended periods were regularly available for language learning, we could afford to make mistakes. As it stands, we do not have that luxury. Indeed, not developing well-designed curricula may well be the most serious omission the foreign-language profession has permitted. Although curricular neglect seems to hold as well in other parts of the academy, it is debilitating for language study because of the field's already marginal status and because of the kinds of competencies learners are increasingly interested in attaining, even in a short period of time.

Taking a literacy view of learning goals and outcomes can help overcome narrow disputes

Finally, any description of the contexts for curriculum construction must include a discussion of learning goals and outcomes. Much of the conversation about foreign-language goals in higher education has been trapped in its own taxonomies and historical structures, expending precious time and energy on unproductive (because false) dichotomies. Among them are deliberations whether one should prefer communicative or grammar-based teaching or whether one should teach literature vs. language, or use literary texts vs. nonliterary texts from a range of subject matter areas—as though these stood in any substantive opposition to each other or really addressed the kinds of learning goals higher education has to espouse.

These arguments are artifacts of our professional history that have little to do with the foundational trajectory in instructed language learning for literate adults—its progression from private, familial, or transactional discourses to a range of situated public discourses so that learners may attain an encompassing second-language literacy.

For all their innovativeness, proponents of communicative and proficiency-oriented instruction have generally excluded this trajectory from

their frames of reference and preferred metaphors (Byrnes 2002c; Ortega and Iberri-Shea 2005), an exclusion that is all the more noteworthy in view of the strong evidence that elaborated literacy practices have to be explicitly taught in the second language, just as they are in the first (Gee 1998; Schleppegrell 2004). Facility in the discerning use of public discourse requires speakers to engage in forms of semiosis, that is, in forms of meaning making, that differ functionally from the private or personal (usually oral) discourses that are our heritage as humans.

Public discursive abilities are enhanced through reflective work, such as occurs when learners understand how the social and institutional contexts surrounding business, medicine, science, and technical fields (for example) shape the discourse that people use in those environments—the business negotiation, the medical consultation, the scientific report, the engineering proposal—and, consequently, how they as nonnative users would locate themselves within them. As Hasan (1999, 75) states, developing such a habitus by working with a discourse and literacy pedagogy would yield a benefit without parallel, as it would enable one to decipher the world, to read closely the propositions one is confronted with.

Giving collegiate foreign-language programs a literacy trajectory stands at some distance from the current emphasis on learner needs as driving curriculum building, a focus that is primarily expressed through task-centered language teaching (Long to appear; Long and Crookes 1992, 1993; Nunan 1993). Needs-based curriculum construction is less than optimal for colleges because, in general, neither institutions nor individual learners can know, in any substantive way, students' future language needs. Language learners tend simply to want to learn to speak the language well. Only in big state institutions with multiple tracks or in targeted, professionally oriented programs (such as the German and engineering program at the University of Rhode Island) would a real needs-based approach to curriculum construction seem to be practicable.

In the meantime, departments are challenged to build from the learners' unspecified notions of what knowing a language means a programmatic context that allows for the possibility, if not necessarily the reality, of an encompassing second-language literacy: being able to use a second language comfortably and

competently both in their private lives—in family, neighborhood, and community, in leisure and social interaction—and, at least for some, also in their working lives, whether these are lived in a well-defined local community or in the professional environment of the globalized economy.

Collegiate programs can meet that challenge by creating curricula that take into account the fact that language learning for literate adults is a long-term project leading toward literacy in the second language—with literacy understood to encompass the above-mentioned primary and secondary discourses of a culture and its language. Curriculum builders must incorporate into their work broad insights about long-term language learning in instructed settings for literate adults, knowledge that is at present spotty and, with the exception of work in systemic-functional linguistics, that I will explicate subsequently, insufficiently discursively oriented (but see McCarthy and Carter 1994; Kern 2000).

These understandings about the goals and the paths of good instructed second-language learning for adults must then be negotiated in terms of what is institutionally and programmatically possible and what is pedagogically realizable. Finally, the institution's plan should respond to the larger interests of society and to the particular interests of individuals. This is the agenda of curriculum development at the college level; this is what a curriculum would be designed to accomplish.

Approaches to curriculum construction

The paucity of curricular thinking demands that we begin by clarifying central notions of curriculum, a way of making curriculum building itself come to be accepted as good educational practice at the college level. Upon such understandings we will then be able to entertain public proposals that explore what the construct of curriculum stands for and how it would be implemented in particular programmatic contexts.

Any curriculum development builds on selection and sequencing, both inherently highly interpretive choices. That said, the need for curriculum construction in the foreign-language context is most pressing under two conditions: first, if the program is so constrained that it must make up,

through careful conceptualization and planning, what it lacks in time, and second, if adult instructed learners are to attain upper levels of performance in their second languages.

Wording the issue from the perspective of would-be curricular planners, one could say that a faculty group contemplating the demanding and labor-intensive task of curriculum construction should be united by a strong sense that its instructional goals—even in languages that are not cognate to English and often have completely different literacy practices and writing systems—reach beyond basic interpersonal communicative abilities. This is so since any reasonably competent language teaching, even with a relatively uncoordinated aggregation of courses, is generally able to bring students to basic interactive language performance, irrespective of the language. Indeed, American foreign-language instruction has, by and large, been remarkably successful on that score.

However, if one takes a more expansive perspective of what it means to know a language, success becomes considerably more elusive—and it will be even more elusive in the future as expectations rise for both cognate and noncognate languages. This is so because, for all its variation, language learning and teaching that targets upper levels of performance and incipient second-language literacy must recognize that situated, purposive, and meaningful language use is the fundamental condition for language learning by literate adults.

As research and practice are beginning to show, those characteristics can be made particularly salient in a text-based approach to curriculum development, more specifically a genre-based approach supported by a genre-based pedagogy (see the contributions in Byrnes and Maxim 2004; Hyland 2004; Johns 2002; Martin 1999). Far from disregarding sentence-level accuracy, a text-based approach incorporates sophisticated appreciation of the interplay among accuracy, fluency, and complexity of language learning at each stage of the learning process, and of continued and carefully balanced development of accuracy, fluency, and complexity over time within a larger textual environment. (For a discussion of more psycholinguistically oriented processing issues, see Skehan 1998 and the contributions in Robinson 2001).

A curricular framework also allows us to address issues of pedagogy. Specific pedagogical decisions are grounded not in general methodological dictums but in thoughtful awareness of the long-term consequences of certain instructional practices over a learner's course of study (Byrnes 2000). Conversely, a curricular proposal can be publicly queried for its soundness as it comes to life in a pedagogy of informed choices that considers short- and long-range performance outcomes (Doughty and Williams 1998).

Viewed within a curricular framework, the traditional preoccupation with the perfect method turns out to be misguided. The perfect method, we realize, cannot exist because appropriate pedagogies are always situated choices within a long-term learning trajectory. But the curricular framework also contrasts with unbounded methodological eclecticism and its extreme postulate, that instruction does not matter. Instruction does matter, as Norris and Ortega (2000) have convincingly shown in their comprehensive research meta-analysis.

By reversing priorities, from methods to curriculum, we can strive for optimal learning outcomes since pedagogical interventions are now contextualized instances of teacher decision-making that are informed and supported by a previously developed educational context—the curriculum. Providing a publicly knowable and shared context, based on consensual decisions about selection and sequencing, is a rarely mentioned, yet crucial, contribution that curriculum can make to teaching and learning.

To present a curriculum is to propose a sequence of educational opportunities for learners that builds on internal relations and continuities among the major units of instruction. Central considerations are the selection of content and its sequencing—the what of the curriculum—and the delivery of that content in both the larger educational environment and the particular instructional setting—the how. At the same time, a curriculum is also a critical act of defining the role of the learner and, by extension, the act of learning (see Byrnes 1998, 265–66). Finally, a curriculum is a policy decision about the purpose and nature of education.

Exploring principles for curriculum construction

In arguing for the importance of curriculum construction I have already referred to a number of desirable characteristics, all derived from the centrality of meaning in adult instructed foreign-language learning. In the following section I explore more explicitly the connection between curriculum and the adult's well-known focus on meaning and posit some broad principles for curriculum construction.

The centrality of meaning in adult instructed foreign-language learning

Having noticed that adults focus on the meaning rather than the form of language, researchers in second-language acquisition frequently offer that observation as an explanation for why adult learners find it so difficult to acquire the formal inventory of a second language to an acceptable level of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. While the conclusion is true in a general way it is not particularly insightful. In fact, it has the potential for being misleading if it is interpreted as justifying an old-style (or even new-style) sentence-level, meaning-divorced grammar instruction—an all-too-frequent occurrence. Instead, as Byrnes and Sprang (2004) illustrate with the development of narrativity, a capacity that inherently involves complex use of tense and aspect, these sentence-level phenomena can really only be properly situated and properly acquired within a larger textual frame of reference. In that case, the meaning-driven nature of language behaviors alerts foreign-language professionals to the need to rethink how knowledge (or meaning) and language are related and, by extension, how they can and should be related in adult foreign-language learning and in adult foreign-language instruction.

To a significant extent, current practices assume the validity of a normative and essentialist model of knowledge and language, where knowledge and language are viewed as independent of each other and knowledge pre-exists out there, as it were, in an idealized, even God-given metaphysical realm. Language is reduced to being, prototypically, the act of naming the pre-existent givens, and learning becomes the application of largely arbitrary rules or the build-up of a formidable array of one-to-one correspondences in vocabulary (with differences construed as deviations from that expectation).

Theorizing over the last two decades or so, by contrast, favors the possibility of considering language as a culturally embedded form of human meaning-making, in short, of language as a social semiotic (Halliday 1994; Lantolf 2000). Here knowledge is understood as being intricately linked to the language patterns of situated language use, where the very use of language is a way of knowing and a way of being that is historical and directly related to social action.

In the former Soviet bloc, Bakhtin (1986) and Vygotsky (1978) were among those who explored such an approach. In the West the same approach has appeared in research in sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and at times pragmatics, often applied to the analysis of native language phenomena. Where it is concerned with language learning—native and otherwise—it has been dubbed functional and is particularly associated with the British-Australian linguist Halliday. Halliday and his followers emphasize a symbiotic relationship between human activity and language with, as Hasan (1995, 184) puts it, the very existence of one as the condition for the existence of the other.

By investigating key constructs of systemic-functional linguistics—context of situation, register, text, and text structure—it is possible to arrive at principles for curriculum building that exemplify that role of language in human life. Thus, Halliday turns on their head the notions of language and grammar that prevail in language instructional contexts. Instead of considering language to be a system of forms, to which meanings are then attached he considers it to be a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realized (1994, xiv). In particular, two central meanings are addressed by language, namely (i) to understand the environment (ideational), and (ii) to act on the others in it (interpersonal). Combined with these is a third metafunctional component, the textual, which breathes relevance into the other two (xiii).

Dramatically different from a structuralist grammar, which is a grammar of syntagmatic linearity, Halliday's is a grammar not of normative rules but of choices and relations, where the grammatical system as a whole represents the semantic code of a language and the context of culture determines the nature of the code (xxxi). Thought-provoking for our concern with adult instructed foreign-language learning is Halliday's statement regarding child language

learning: As a language is manifested through its texts, a culture is manifested through its situations; so by attending to text-in-situation a child construes the code, and by using the code to interpret the text he construes the culture (xxxi).

To sum up, the relationship of language and knowledge is that language as *social semiotic praxis* ... should be seen unequivocally as a *construer* of reality, not just as its *representer* .... It does not *represent* reality; it simply *construes a model* of reality (Hasan 1999, 53). Therefore, while language as a system may be considered arbitrary with regard to the species-specific potentialities of human language-making capacity, the relation between meaning and that level of the language code that Halliday labels its lexicogrammar is far from arbitrary but, instead, constitutive.

Making content the foundation of collegiate language curricula

What does the Hallidayan approach mean for our concern with curriculum? How might it affect curriculum construction?

The theoretical insights and practical experiences to be gleaned from the Hallidayan approach are eminently worthy of exploration if we wish, at long last, to integrate language and culture—or language and knowledge—in more than trivial ways. Assuming that collegiate foreign-language curricula must address both the acquisition of knowledge and of language—in both the first and second languages and in their relationship to each other—then one important task is to treat content not as an afterthought, but as constitutive for language acquisition. A particularly rich discussion of the consequences of such thinking, primarily for first language literacy development in schools, but by extension, for literacy development in second languages, using a systemic functional linguistics framework is presented by Schleppegrell (2004) who carefully relates the grammatical and discourse features of the language expected in school tasks to the content areas, role relationships, and purposes and expectations that they realize in schooling contexts.

Extending such insights into the adult foreign language curriculum suggests that creating a content-oriented curriculum will require us to go beyond what has generally been described as content-based instruction in the

primary or secondary grades and beyond what has been described as the language-across-the-curriculum project at the college level (see, for example, Adams 1996; Krueger and Ryan 1993; Met 1998, 1999). It must also go beyond the proposals of the Standards Project, launched in 1996, because those proposals continue to rely on a normative grammar and a form-focused paradigm that separates language use from knowledge (Byrnes 2002c). Moreover, they lack a means of linking knowledge and language acquisition, one that would support the project's goals of communication, culture, connections, communities, and comparison *and* language acquisition. Differentiating the proposed curricular project from these dominant models will be an important step.

Next, we must acknowledge that content for adult second-language learners, contrasted perhaps with younger learners, is not inherently sequenceable. There is no objective way of deciding whether learners would be better served by first learning about the geography and history of the target area or culture, reading about its contemporary political processes, practicing how to meet and greet people at a cocktail party, or learning to make hotel reservations over the telephone. Any of these learning scenarios may well be worthwhile. But in general curricula decisions on how to sequence content must be grounded in aspects of language acquisition that are closely connected to *genres*.

Genres are how things get done, says Martin (1985, 250), when language is used to accomplish them. They range from literary to far from literary forms: poems, narratives, expositions, lectures, seminars, recipes, manuals, appointment making, service encounters, news broadcasts and so on. As defined by Christie (1999, 760) genre is a staged, purposeful activity that serves important social goals. To Gee (1998) genres are ways of being in the world.

When sequencing decisions are grounded in genre, the kind of interactive, situated, phatic, or transactional language use that is implied by the party encounter or the traveler's inquiry is indeed likely to be appropriate beginner fare, much as communicative language teaching has presented it. But that is true not because of the content of such exchanges but because their language use characteristics are within the grasp of beginners, whereas those

associated with historical summaries or policy debates in oral or written genres are beyond the reach of beginners and even intermediate language learners from the standpoint of acquisition, and thus of processing.

Beyond the early proposals to rethink curricula, presented most convincingly by Long (1994) and Long and Crookes (1992, 1993), we need more fine-grained decision-making criteria for selection and sequencing. Here the approaches developed in systemic-functional linguistics hold particular promise. Initially a theoretical alternative to structuralist notions of grammar, systemic-functional linguistics has the necessary theoretical apparatus as well as longstanding pedagogical commitments. Together these provide principles, constructs, and examples for linking content or knowledge and language form. Specifically, in concentrating its analytical potential beyond the sentence-level and focusing on language use in public life, especially in educational settings, systemic functional linguistics has established the notion of *genre* as an apt construct for elucidating the relationship between socially situated knowledge and language and, therefore, for language learning (Eggins 1994; Hyland 2004; Johns 2002). While its insights have thus far been primarily applied to the first-language context (Martin 1999), most especially in multilingual and multicultural Australia, they are gradually being considered as well for second-language education, primarily in upper level instruction in English as a second language (Jones et al., 1989; Schleppegrell 2004) and, most recently, also for foreign language curriculum construction and pedagogy (Developing multiple literacies 2000).

The larger intent in promoting functional grammar and genre is to create the possibility of a grammar for purposes of text analysis: one that would make it possible to say sensible and useful things about any text, spoken or written, in modern English (Halliday 1994, xv). Through a rich understanding of genre we can come to understand that language is not a *domain* of human knowledge [but] the essential condition of knowledge, the process by which experience *becomes* knowledge (Halliday 1993, 94, emphasis in original).

Reconsidering foreign-language educational goals in terms of multiple literacies

Selecting genre as an appropriate foundation for curricular selection and sequencing also forces us to reconsider our larger goals—a welcome development since it places foreign-language learning in proximity to the goals of education. At heart these goals are about expanding literacy (Gee 1998; Hasan 1999; New London Group 1996; Schleppegrell 2004). The impact of such a move would be most striking at advanced levels of language ability. Here the idea of language—and its use and development—as being discursively realized semiosis is particularly felicitous because a genre provides a model of text in context, of discourse in relation to grammar and lexis and to those semiotic systems which language itself realizes (Martin 1985, 249).

On that basis the relationship between meaning and form can be explored in three key dimensions: in terms of the *field*, which refers to particular content or subject matter areas; in terms of *tenor*, which acknowledges the dynamics of particular communicative settings with a range of participants and participant relationships; and, finally, in terms of *mode*, the particular construal of processes, participants, circumstances, and relations that a speaker employs and that affects the nature of the entire text, even as the text itself is affected by the communicative channels being employed (oral, written, interactive, monologic).

For collegiate foreign-language programs in literary-cultural studies it is noteworthy that Halliday's systemic-functional grammar shows a striking similarity to the dialogic approaches chosen by Bakhtin (1986) as a way of explicating the phenomenon of language use in society, especially through the notion of genre. Taken together, the analytical capabilities of a Hallidayan functional linguistics and an awareness of the societal situatedness of stable forms of linguistic action as Bakhtin has developed it in his speech genres offer a way of imagining second-language performance within the conceptual framework of a developing multiple literacy, regardless of content emphasis. Such an orientation is also akin to Cook's (1999) notion of multicompetence as an appropriate goal for foreign-language learning, a way of relating first- and second-language capabilities to each other rather than aiming at an ersatz native-level performance.

Reconsidering pedagogies through genre

Thus far, I have highlighted the potential of genre as a principle for organizing curricula. But given the intimate relationship between curriculum and pedagogy, we should explore as well the potential of a genre-based pedagogy. My experience with *Developing Multiple Literacies,* a curricular project in the German Department at Georgetown University, shows the genre-based pedagogies developed in Australia to be eminently transferable to the adult instructed foreign-language context, with gratifying results across all modalities of language use (see the contributions in Byrnes and Maxim 2004 and the extensive discussion of the curricular project at www.georgetown.edu/departments/german/programs/curriculum).

I offer two further points to support the assertion that a genre approach can enhance both the interpretive comprehension and the situated choices in language production that characterize competent and versatile first-language learners and users (Street 1999; New London Group 1996) and also advanced second-language learners. If it is true that to use a genre freely and creatively is not the same as to create a genre from the beginning: genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely (Bakhtin 1986, 80), then foreign-language instruction is about teaching learners to make meaning-driven choices within the framework of genres. Learners who can make such choices can indeed find their voices and identities in second-language genres and can celebrate their status as multicompetent speakers in the other language, something that, echoing Bakhtin, I have called emerging heteroglossia (Byrnes 2001). That same phenomenon can be expanded from specific language tasks, such as writing, to the entire phenomenon of nonnative learners acquiring high levels of competence in a foreign language (Byrnes and Maxim 2004; Byrnes, Crane, and Sprang 2002; Cook 1999l; Crane, Liamkina, and Ryshina-Pankova 2004).

While genre, through thematically arranged texts, can serve as a macro-organizational principle for a curriculum, with obvious implications for pedagogy, it is the notion of *task* that is likely to be most useful for imagining and planning specific pedagogical interventions at different stages within a curriculum. Critical here is the potential of task to provide ways of guiding

students through a balanced development of accuracy, fluency, and complexity over long instructional sequences (Byrnes 2002b). As stated above, a task-based approach has been advocated for some time, particularly in the ESL literature. However, since most such work focuses on the early stages of second-language learning and, quite remarkably, can even advocate an atextual approach (Doughty and Long 2003), much translation is necessary before its insights can be profitably transferred into a literacy- and discourse-based curriculum and pedagogy suitable for U.S. colleges.

Conceptualizing foreign-language curricula in relation to other language-learning settings

Earlier in the paper I suggested that curriculum construction takes place at an in-between-level, as it were. It must consider the adult learners' second-language-learning characteristics and interests just as it must consider institutional contexts, negotiating one against the other. But it must also observe other relations to the extent that higher education is not the sole purveyor or sole possessor of the sites within which a second language is learned. In fact, colleges are part of an increasingly socially distributed environment for knowledge creation, with all the implications that has for higher education, and particularly for second-language learning. (For an interesting discussion of these issues, see Gibbons and others 1994.) As a result, those responsible for collegiate foreign-language instruction must learn to link creatively different educational settings in order to bring about contexts that are maximally conducive to continued language learning.

A well-conceived curriculum will make it easier to forge those links and to address the following related challenges:

- Developing articulations between secondary and postsecondary instruction, and between undergraduate and graduate programs (the latter being necessary to ensure that nonnative graduate students attain the kind of high-level abilities in the second language that the job market demands of them)
- Linking learning inside the classroom with concurrent learning opportunities outside it, whether or not these opportunities are directly tied to the instructional program (for example, course-based discussion-groups

contrasted with informal opportunities for developing conversational abilities)

- Linking learning during the academic year with learning in various settings during the summer, in the United States or abroad
- Connecting study abroad, with or without a formal instructional component, to an instructional program in the United States—before and after the sojourn abroad
- Finding ways to accommodate different entry and exit points for language learning
- Using technology, either directly in instruction or as a way to allow individual learners to push their learning into other performance environments or into more comfortable levels of performance
- Assuring the possibility of lifelong engagement with language learning, not merely as an ideologically desirable notion, but as a real possibility for people whose personal or professional circumstances make such an engagement desirable or necessary.

We should not expect curriculum construction to eliminate all of the shortcomings of foreign-language learning in the United States as with a magic wand. But we should expect curriculum development work to address a surprising number of intellectual, structural, and pedagogical impasses in the field whose resolution has a direct bearing on what we are able to contribute to societies that increasingly require high levels of multilingual competence for the welfare of their communities and the individuals living within them.

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